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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0342
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 4446
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0308
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9535
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2433
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3836
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9532
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0220
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000950

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/12/2016
TAGS: PREF PGOV PREL PHUM NP
SUBJECT: INDIANS THINKING OF PRESSURING BHUTAN ON REFUGEES

REF: A. KATHMANDU 391

1B. KATHMANDU 745
1C. KATHMANDU 894

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (C) On April 7, the Ambassador met separately with his Indian and Australian counterparts and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Resident Representative Abraham Abraham to discuss Bhutanese refugee issues. Cognizant of His Majesty's Government of Nepal's (HMGN) fear that Bhutan could expel ethnic Nepali refugees in the future, Indian Ambassador Shiv Mukherjee acknowledged to the Ambassador that it would be good if India could pressure Bhutan to take back a "token number" of refugees. Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade told the Ambassador that his government was still formulating a policy on Bhutanese refugees, but noted that Canberra also wanted to ensure that Bhutan would not expel ethnic Nepalis in the future. The Ambassador shared this concern, and explained that was why internationalization would likely have to involve some sort of condemnation of Bhutan's past actions. Abraham reiterated that UNHCR was prepared to assist countries supporting internationalization of the Bhutanese refugee issue. He opined that it would be better for member countries to ask UNHCR to host an international conference on Bhutanese refugees, rather than simply relying on UNHCR to drive the issue. End Summary.

India: Token Returnees Could Reassure Nepal

12. (C) Indian Ambassador Shiv Mukherjee stated that Indian officials in New Delhi would discuss Bhutanese refugee issues with the Nepali Ambassador to India, Karna Adhikari, the week of April 10. He noted that Bhutan was spinning the notion that Nepal did not want to act, as HMGN was not proceeding with UNHCR's registration process and had rejected Bhutan's latest offer to discuss the issue with Foreign Minister

Pandey in Thimpu. However, Mukherjee acknowledged that it was hard to deny that the Bhutanese goal was to take back no refugees. He noted the international community's growing acceptance of the idea that the issue needed to be internationalized. Mukherjee accepted Nepal's concern over future expulsion by Bhutan of remaining ethnic Nepalese. He commented that it would be good for Bhutan to take back a token 100 refugees to quiet this fear. He promised to urge New Delhi to push Bhutan to repatriate at least a few refugees. The Ambassador welcomed the effort, noting that third-country resettlement could move quickly if the international community did not need to reach a consensus to condemn Bhutan and Nepal was satisfied that Bhutan had admitted it had done wrong in the past. However, the Ambassador cautioned that this should not be used as yet another delaying tactic by Bhutan.

Australia Still Formulating Policy

¶3. (C) Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade told the Ambassador that his government was still formulating its policy on Bhutanese refugees. Lade noted that some in Australia believed that HMGN should do more. He asked the Ambassador whether the reason HMGN had not moved on refugees amounted to maliciousness or incompetence. The Ambassador agreed that HMGN should allow urgent resettlement of vulnerable refugees and should allow UNHCR to register refugees. He added that the frequent change in governments in Nepal, and the ability of Bhutan to work the egos of each successive foreign minister, led him to believe HMGN incompetence was the issue. Lade remarked that Abraham seemed to believe that HMGN was using vulnerable refugees as hostage, and that there was now little hope of beginning a gradual approach to resettlement with the most vulnerable cases. The Ambassador agreed, noting his disappointment. Lade commented that many in Australia considered India "duplicitous," as India had allowed the refugees to transit to Nepal in 1990. The Ambassador expressed optimism that India could play a constructive role in pushing internationalization. While pointing out that India was aware of the impossibility of keeping people in camps indefinitely, the Ambassador acknowledged that India was reluctant to push Bhutan. Lade stated that Canberra was also concerned about the ethnic Nepalis still in Bhutan. The Ambassador shared the concern, and explained that was why internationalization would have to involve some sort of measure to ensure that Bhutan did not expel more people.

UNHCR: Countries Should Drive Issue

¶4. (C) UNHCR Resident Representative Abraham Abraham stressed that his organization was prepared to assist countries supporting internationalization of the Bhutanese refugee issue. He opined that it would be better for member countries to lobby UNHCR to hold an international conference on Bhutanese refugees, rather than simply relying on UNHCR itself to drive the issue. He stated that Erika Feller, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, planned to visit Nepal on April 21-25 and would urge Foreign Minister Pandey to move toward internationalization. Abraham worried that if the international condemnation was too harsh or too public, then Bhutan might dig in. The Ambassador countered that there was little Bhutan could do other than not take back any refugees, which was the same policy it had followed successfully for sixteen years. Abraham noted that some refugees might not understand what third-country resettlement entailed because UNHCR could not educate people without raising refugee expectations and the ire of HMGN.

Comment

¶5. (C) Ensuring that Bhutan does not expel ethnic Nepalis still in Bhutan remains a key issue in resolving the Bhutanese refugee issue.

MORIARTY